

Commissioner's Weekly Wrap Up

DCS Communications Office

December 17, 2004

The Week Ahead

The Commissioner will be on vacation next week.

DCS Employee News

Rosemary Nolen, CPS acting team coordinator in the Southwest Region's Fayette/Hardeman/Lauderdale/Tipton cluster, is leaving DCS after 14 years. A reception for Nolen is scheduled for Mon., Dec. 20, from 2-4 p.m. at the Tipton County DCS office in Covington, located at 230 Industrial Road. During her years with DCS, Nolen has worked with and/or supervised CPS, foster care and juvenile justice. She says she is looking forward to spending more time with her family, especially her grandson, who is 10 months old.

DCS Employee Wins Gingerbread House Contest



Carol Humphrey, staff attorney III, and her sister, a teacher in Blount County, have been entering a gingerbread house contest at "Fantasy of Trees," the annual Christmas fund-raiser for East Tennessee Children's Hospital for years. At the fund-raiser, attendees bid on the houses, and entrants face stiff competition, vying against schools, professional chefs and

others. In an extended effort to earn a win, Carol and her sister visited Atlanta to spy on other gingerbread houses for ideas.

This year, the 60-hours it took to complete the house from start to finish really paid off. They won first place and the gingerbread house sold for \$100.00. It's an experience Humphrey finds invaluable. "(My sister) had the first-grade teacher arts and crafts gene, so I do most of the mixing and baking, and she does most of the decorating. We've done it every year since my mom passed away from cancer – six years ago – as we all used to go to the 'Fantasy of Trees' every year as a family tradition."

Mileage Rate Increases

Submitted by Ken Sanders, Executive Director, Office of Finance and Program Support

State Department of Finance and Administration Commissioner David Goetz has approved an increase for employee travel reimbursement. The new rate is 38 cents per mile. There may still be misunderstanding in some regions regarding travel and expenses reimbursement for new employees during their initial "new employee" training. Last summer, I approved a variance for our new employees to submit travel claims at the end of each week while they were in new employee training. This variance from normal monthly travel reimbursement procedures is to help our new employees with their out-of-pocket expenses during the initial training period.

TRIPS Coming to a Computer Near You

It's been a long time coming, but the new state-designed "TRIPS" travel system is going live in the Davidson County Region for December travel claims. If the testing goes well, the other regions will be trained and added during the next several months.

"Building Families – One Child at a Time"

As DCS begins to conclude "Building Families – One Child at a Time," the regions continue the mission and mantra of National Adoption Awareness Month. Recently, Bradley County finalized several adoptions. On December 16, two teen-agers, a handicapped child and a sibling group successfully found permanent homes.



DCS New Computer Deployment in High Gear

Submitted by Eddie Rhodman, Director, Infrastructure Development & Support

The long-awaited replacement of SACWIS II desktop computers has begun. The DCS Office of Information Systems (OIS) operates on a four-year computer replacement cycle. At the end of this cycle, computers older than four years will be replaced with new Dell desktop computer systems. Nearly half of the 4,300 desktops will be replaced this year. To date, 1005

new computers have been installed and by January 31, 2005, OIS will have deployed nearly 1,600 new systems into the field. The top-notch installation task force comprised of trained DSE's has been working arduously, since the project began on December 6, and has received a positive response from employees. OIS is continually looking at new technologies and procedures that will enhance the work and provide the tools that help make work more productive, efficient and simple. The following is a list of the areas that have been completed and those that are scheduled.

New computers have been installed at the following locations:

Woodland Hills
CPS Central Intake
Hamilton County Region
Southeast Region
Northeast Region
Knox Region
East Region

New computers will be installed at the following locations in 2005:

Upper Cumberland Region – 267 desktops by Jan. 14, 2005
Mid Cumberland Office – 359 desktops by Jan. 31, 2005
Central Office – 261 desktops by Feb. 11, 2005
Davidson Region – 302 desktops by Feb. 24, 2005
South Central Region – 227 desktops by Mar. 9, 2005
Northwest Region – 160 desktops by Mar. 17, 2005
Southwest Region – 282 desktops by Mar. 29, 2005
Shelby Region – 434 desktops by Apr. 11, 2005

The Gift of Empowering Families

Submitted by Lane Simpson, Executive Administrative Assistant 2 to the Commissioner

As the holiday season approaches, we should be mindful of the powerful gift each of us in this line of work has been given to influence families and change lives. Although this “gift” seldom wins us any appreciation or accolades, the fact remains that, for whatever brief period we are given the chance to be in the lives of our families, we have an obligation to impact these families in as positive a way as we possibly can – to model appropriate behaviors and to educate children and families. This gift allows us to influence the future in a way that no other single event or series of events ever could.

The DCS Practice Model embraces the philosophy that children simply do not exist in isolation; they exist as a part of families. Families in turn exist as a part of communities. To gird ourselves with the armor of being a child welfare agency and ignore the impact and import of the family and the community on the lives of our children is to deny one of the fundamental tenets of this guiding document. Moreover, as our own history has taught us, we

cannot go about the business of caring for children without focusing a large portion of our efforts on the family dynamics that our children experience.

The implementation of this family-centered approach may involve a paradigm shift in the way that we approach the process of managing cases. With the emphasis now being placed on involving families in the decision-making process, it has become increasingly important to connect these families in the planning and implementation of our work in each case. We simply cannot accomplish this goal without first learning how to engage our families in the process. It is crucial that we understand how much more willing families will be to work towards a resolution of these cases when they are given the power to input and influence the decisions being made, rather than having a cookie cutter plan forced upon them by our agency.

Child and Family Team Meetings are the single most effective tool in involving these families in the process and in engaging them in formulating a relevant plan to address their specific needs. We need not view these meetings as just another task forced upon us by an onerous workload in our seemingly never-ending days. Instead, we should embrace them as a tool to be used in motivating our families to involve all the relevant community partners and resources in identifying for themselves the nature of the needs that forced our involvement. We need to realize that inviting more people to CFTMs does not mean more work for us, but better work for families that will be able to look around the room and see, sometimes for the first time, the strength and support that they have in their relatives, neighbors and friends.

It is only through this process of engaging our families that we will be able to have a complete buy-in from them that will fuel their desire to become a better family unit for themselves and their children. This engagement is also the vehicle by which we, as an agency, can propel ourselves to better outcomes for families, reduced recidivism and help produce a brighter future, through which we can hold our heads high, knowing that we have truly achieved the best practice standards for the children and families of Tennessee.

Continuous Quality Improvement

Submitted by Ted Slifer, Program Coordinator, QA/CQI Division, Office of Performance Enhancement

Blessed Be the Tie That Binds – Team Cohesion

The purpose of this article is to assist all of us in becoming aware of the need to develop and maintain team cohesion in the CQI process. Team cohesion is comprised of two elements – cohesion and commitment. Cohesion is the feeling of belonging that shapes a group of individuals into a team. Commitment is the acceptance by an individual that the organization's vision and mission is his/her vision and mission.

Cohesion and commitment go hand in hand. Cohesion without commitment can be detrimental to a team's performance. For example, a highly cohesive team without the organization's vision and mission will not fulfill and may even run counter to goals as set by

the organization, in our case DCS. In the same manner, commitment without cohesion can lead to only marginal effectiveness. Individuals, though highly committed to the DCS vision and mission, may make small gains only to be confronted by barriers due to a lack of communication and coordination. The consequence of cohesion and commitment is effective individual **and** team performance. Failure to achieve both is often the difference between success and failure.

Every DCS worker belongs to several groups. Examples, to name a few, are the family, clubs, athletics, church and work groups. The group is extremely important in the lives of its members. A group becomes cohesive when its members develop relationships that give them a feeling of belonging. This is expressed when members speak in terms of “we did this,” as opposed to “I did this.” The cohesive group is more than a social group or even a work group – it is a team. Through interaction with other team members, individuals satisfy personal interests and needs, and accomplish the organizational objectives.

The CQI process involves a hierarchy of teams: Level 1 – Local Teams, Level 2 – County/Cluster Teams, Level 3 – Regional Teams, Level 4 – State Team. There are two types of team cohesion – horizontal (within a team) and vertical (between team levels). Horizontal cohesion hopefully (with effort) can take place within any team. It is within the team that members have the most face-to-face contact and within which horizontal cohesion can occur. Vertical cohesion should take place between all team levels. Since the DCS organizational structure is vertical, so should be the development of team cohesion, from the case manager levels to the Core Leadership and regional levels.

Team cohesion, both horizontal and vertical, is the tie that binds all DCS CQI teams into one cohesive team with all team members enjoying the same vision and mission. The CQI process is in the stage of developing formed teams. As individuals are assigned to teams, a role each individual should assume is to help his/her particular team develop cohesion that reflects both the cohesion within a team and a shared commitment to the DCS vision and mission. The formula is as follows:

COHESION + COMMITMENT = TEAM COHESION = INCREASED PERFORMANCE

Core Leadership

**CORE Leadership Meeting
Elizabeth Black, Presiding
December 14, 2004**

Children’s Rights letter dated December 3

The letter identified items that members of Core Leadership are responsible to address before the next compliance meeting on January 26, 2005 with the TAC and plaintiff attorneys.

Debra Valentine and Carla Aaron have a conference call with the plaintiffs’ attorneys on Dec. 16, 2004 to discuss SIU.

Out-of-state travel requests for children in state custody

The Commissioner stated we have authority to approve out-of-state travel request for our children. We want to create a flow to expedite approval as quickly as possible. A TA will not be required for transportation prior to travel and receipts are to be submitted upon return.

Mileage

Ken Sanders reported that there would be an increase from 35 cents to 38 cents a mile for mileage beginning Jan 1, 2005.

New case managers can submit travel reimbursement at the end of the week when they are in pre-service training.

Overtime Report

Joe Cimino provided a report to the Core Leadership Team that summarized the overtime period of July 1 through October 31 of this year. The department has approximately \$200,000 in overtime expenditures. Unfortunately, the report reflects no improvement over the previous reporting period of July 1, 2004 through September 31, 2004. The first quarter report projected annualized overtime of \$9.3 million, while the cumulative report through October 31, 2004 projects annualized overtime of \$9.8 million. This represents a 5 percent increase in one month of \$500,000. The Commissioner wants a substantial improvement by the next quarter and emphasized the regions and management staff would be held accountable in improving this area. Also, rightsizing in regions needs to be completed.

SACWIS Review Kickoff

Analysts for ACF explained the State Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) review process. The purpose of this system is to capture the entire child welfare process. SACWIS, which began in 1994, includes 90 requirements – 50 percent are mandatory and 50 percent are state-selected. If states receive money from the federal government for 50 percent of state-selected requirements, then they, too, become mandatory. Requirements are broken down into components, such as intake, eligibility, system administration and other categories. There is latitude in system design based on state law and policy. We will be having a mini status review – two days in Central Office and one day in the county to provide technical assistance and monitoring.

Regional Implementation Plans

The early Metis report stated the department didn't have a service delivery model or system of practice. This presented a problem because funds couldn't be tied to it. As a result, the first needs assessment led to the development of the Practice Model. The needs assessment identifies the needs of the state and prioritizes and links dollars and resources to address the identified needs. The first needs assessment focused on resources, service delivery and flex funding. The second needs assessment focused on independent living, recruitment and retention of foster and adoptive families, placement process, as well as data we are using to inform our practice around these decisions. The second needs assessment has 60-70 recommendations and our Path to Excellence has addressed at least 80 percent of these

recommendations. Both of the needs assessments are linked and integrated within the Path to Excellence.

We are still in our infancy of learning how to use money to drive outcomes for kids and families strategically. Regional implementation plans have to be tied to funding, which brings our plans to fruition. The dollars allocated to the regions need to be used strategically. We want to have planning sessions prior to the February '05 retreat. The regions need Gant charts by this retreat. Frank Mix and Daryl Chansuthus are developing a Gant chart template to disperse to the regions.

Central office liaisons become critical for this process. If employees commit to stay involved now, they must be committed, or there will be penalties if Central Office liaison doesn't follow through. Central Office liaisons are expected to attend Regional CQI meetings. This will start dialogue on how to ensure that interactions with regions and Central Office occur. Regional implementation plans will be provided to the liaisons as well as the Fred Wulczyn. The health units are also an integral part in the regional CQI process.

Added Weekly Agenda Item

A Central Office liaison will report on their region each week during Core Leadership.

DMRS

Brenda Bell announced that two young adults have been transitioned from DCS to DMRS and two more are scheduled for today.



We all have big changes in our lives that are more or less a second chance.

-Harrison Ford

What children take from us, they give...We become people who feel more deeply, question more deeply, hurt more deeply, and love more deeply.

-Sonia Taitz

